

Sophy of Kravonia.

By ANTHONY HOPE,
Author of "The Prisoner of Zenda."
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[CONTINUED.]

In vain will the readers of this tale of romantic love and brilliant daring search the maps of the world for the picturesque land of Kravonia, wherein lovely, fascinating Sophy and her mysterious Red Star played their parts. This much we may tell him before he embarks on his voyage to Kravonia. But we may assure him that when he reluctantly parts with Sophy, sometime scullery maid of Morpington, Essex, England, later spiritualistic medium of Paris, France, and still later of high rank in Slavia and Volens, in Kravonia, the country of her adoption will be to him, like Zenda and Graustark, more real than are many of the smaller, actual kingdoms of the earth. Sad and tragic in some of its aspects is the love story of Sophy of Kravonia, but its pathos is so lightened by devoted loyalty, hardy bravery and tender, self sacrificing affection that at the end the reader will surely feel its telling has not been unworthy of the master hand of its famous chronicler.



Chapter Four

THE scene is at Hazelby, Lord Dunstanbury's Essex seat. His lordship is striking the top of his breakfast egg.

"I say, Cousin Meg, old Brownlow's got a deuced pretty kitchen maid."

"There you go! There you go! Just like your father and your grandfather and all of them! If the English people had any spirit they'd have swept the Dunstanburies and all the wicked Whig gang into the sea long ago."

"Before you could turn around they'd have bought it up, inclosed it and won an election by opening it to ships at a small fee on Sundays," said Mr. Pinder.

"Why are Whigs worse than Tories?" inquired Mr. Pikes, with an air of patient inquiry.

"The will of heaven, I suppose," sniffed Lady Margaret Duddington.

"To display divine omnipotence in that line," suggested Mr. Pinder.

"A deuced pretty girl!" said Dunstanbury in reflective tones. He was doing his best to reproduce the impression he had received at Morpington hall, but obviously with no great success.

"On some pretext, frivolous though it be, let us drive over and see this miracle," Pinder suggested. "How could we better employ this last day of our visit? You'll drive us over, Percival?"

"No, thank you, Mr. Pinder," said the young man, resolute in wisdom. "I'll send you over if you like."

"I'll come with you," said Pikes. "But how account for ourselves? Old Brownlow is unknown to us."

"If Percival had been going I'd have had nothing to do with it, but I don't mind taking you two old sills," said Lady Margaret. "I wanted to pay a call on Elizabeth Brownlow anyhow. We were at school together once. But I won't guarantee you a sight of the kitchen maid."

"It's a pretty drive for this part of the country," observed Dunstanbury.

"It may well become your favorite road," smiled Mr. Pinder benevolently.

"And since Lady Meg goes with us, it's already ours," added Mr. Pikes gallantly.

So they used to go on for hours at a time, as Dunstanbury has declared, both at Hazelby when they were there and at Lady Meg's house in Berkeley square, where they almost always were. They were pleased to consider themselves politicians—Pikes a Whig, twenty years behind date; Pinder, a Tory, 200. It was all an affectation, assumed for the purpose, but with the very doubtful result of amusing Lady Meg. To Dunstanbury the two old wags—for wags of the sea of society they were for all that each had a sufficient income to his name and a respectable life behind him—were sheerly tiresome, and there seems little ground to differ from his opinion. But they were old family friends, and he endured with his usual graciousness.

Their patroness—they would hardly have glibed at the word—was a more notable person. Lady



generally and Sophy always spoke of her by that style, and we may take the same liberty—was only child of the great Earl of Dunstanbury. The title and estates passed to his grandnephew, but half a million or so of pounds came to her.

The air of the household was stormy that day at Morpington—an incentive to the expedition, not a deterrent, for Lady Meg had she known it. Sophy was in sore disgrace—accused, tried and convicted of insubordination and un-

seemly demeanor toward Mrs. Smilker. The truth seems to be that this good woman (Rest her soul. She has a neat tombstone in Morpington churchyard) loved, like many another good creature, good ale sometimes a trifle too well, and the orders she gave when ale had been plentiful did not always consort with her less mellow injunctions. In no vulgar directness, but with a sarcasm which Mrs. Smilker felt without understanding, Sophy would point out these inconsistencies. Angered and humiliated, fearful, too, perhaps that her subordinate would let the secret out, Mrs. Smilker made haste to have the first word with the powers, and against the word of the cook the word of the cook maid weighed as naught. After smaller troubles of this origin there had come a sort of crisis today. The longest of long lectures had been read to Sophy by mistress and repeated, slightly condensed, by master, then she was sent away to think it over. An abject apology to outraged Mrs. Smilker must be forthcoming or banishment was the decree. Informed of this ultimatum, Sophy went out and hung about the avenue, hoping for Julia to appear. Soon Julia came and heard the story. She had indignation in readiness and, what was more to the purpose, a plan. Soon Sophy's eyes grew bright.

Into this storm tossed house came Lady Meg and her spaniels. This unkind name, derived at first from the size and shape of Mr. Pinder's ears—they were large and hung over at the top—had been stretched to include Mr. Pikes also, with small loss of propriety. Both gentlemen were of low stature, plump of figure, hairy on the face; both followed obediently at the heels of commanding Lady Meg. The amenities of the luncheon table opened hearts. Very soon the tale of Sophy's iniquities was revealed. Incidentally and unavoidably if Sophy's heinous fault were to appear in its true measure the tally of the Brownlows' benevolence was reckoned. But Mrs. Brownlow won small comfort from Lady Meg. She got a stiff touch of the truth.

"Ran in and out of the drawing room!" she said. "Did she? The truth is, Lizzie, you've spoiled her, and now you're angry with her for being spoiled."

"What is she now, Mrs. Brownlow?" asked Pinder, with a sly intention. Was this Percival's deuced pretty girl? "She works in the kitchen, Mr. Pinder."

"The girl!" his eyes signaled to Mr. Pikes. "Let Lady Meg see her," he urged insinuatingly. "She has a wonderful way with girls."

"I don't want to see her, and I know your game, Pinder," said Lady Meg. "I'm afraid she must go," sighed Mrs. Brownlow. Her husband said, more robustly, that such an event would be a good riddance—a saying repeated, with the rest of the conversation, by the butler (one William Byles, still living), to the gratified ears of Mrs. Smilker in the kitchen.

"But I'm not easy about her future. She's an odd child, and looks it."

"Pretty?" This from Mr. Pinder.

"Well, I don't know. Striking looking, you'd rather say perhaps, Mr. Pinder."

"Let her go her own way. We've talked quite enough about her." Lady Meg sounded decisive and not a little bored.

"And then," Mrs. Brownlow made bold to go on for a moment, "such a funny mark! Many people wouldn't like it, I'm sure."

Lady Meg turned sharply on her. "Mark? What do you mean? What mark?"

"A mark on her face, you know. A round red mark."

"Big as a threepenny bit, pretty nearly," said Smilker, the squire.

"Where?"

"On her cheek."

"Where is the girl?" asked Lady Meg. Her whole demeanor had changed, her bored air had vanished. "She seemed fair excited," Mr. Byles reports. Then she turned to the said Byles: "Find out where that girl is, and let me know. Don't tell her anything about it. I'll go to her."

"But let me send for her!" began the squire courteously.

"No; give me my own way. I don't want her frightened."

The squire gave the orders she desired, and the last Mr. Byles heard as he left the room was from Lady Meg: "Marks like that always mean something—eh, Pinder?"

No doubt Mr. Pinder agreed, but his reply is lost.

The girls in the avenue had made their plan. Sophy would not bow her head to Mrs. Smilker nor longer eat the bread of benevolence embittered by servitude. She would go with Julia. She, too, would tread the boards if only she could get her feet on them. And when did any girl seriously doubt her ability to do that? The pair were gay and laughing when suddenly through the gate came Lady Meg and the spaniels, Lady Meg ahead as usual and with a purposeful air.

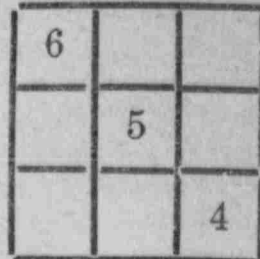
"Who are they?" cried Sophy. Hazelby is but twelve miles from Morpington. Julia had been over to see the big house and had sighted

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